

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY ANTANANARIVO

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 142619

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM

SUBJECT: DRAFT HUMAN RIGHTS PLAN FOR MADAGASCAR

REF: STATE 139160

1. DEPARTMENT WOULD APPRECIATE EMBASSY COMMENTS ON
FOLLOWING DRAFT COUNTRY PLAN BY JUNE 28. WOULD APPRECIATE
PRECISE FIGURES ON POLITICAL PRISONERS, IF AVAILABLE.
PLEASE SLUG FOR AF DISTRIBUTION ONLY.

A. HUMAN RIGHTS CONDITIONS

1. INTEGRITY OF THE PERSON.
POLITICAL ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS OCCUR RARELY IN MADAGAS-
CAR, AND USUALLY ONLY WHEN THE GOVERNMENT BELIEVES THERE
IS A THREAT TO ITS SECURITY OR STABILITY.(PRESIDENT RATSIR-
AKA S POLITICAL BASE IS SHALLOW AND HE IS FIRMLY IN CONTROL
LARGELY BECAUSE OF THE ABSENCE OF ALTERNATIVE LEADERSHIP.)
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PAGE 02 STATE 142619

THERE ARE RARELY POLITICAL PRISONERS IN MADAGASCAR'S JAILS,
AND EVEN PERSONS WELL KNOWN TO BE OPPOSED TO THE CURRENT
REGIME ARE ALLOWED TO PROSELYTIZE, TRAVEL DOMESTICALLY AND
ABROAD AND TO BE FREE FROM OPPRESSION. AFTER RATSIRAKA'S
ACCESSION TO POWER IN 1975, HE PROCLAIMED AN AMNESTY FOR
ALL POLITICAL INFRACTIONS COMMITTED PRIOR TO JANUARY 1
OF THAT YEAR.

IN THE EARLY FALL OF 1976 A HANDFUL OF LEFTIST LED STU-
DENTS STAGED A STRIKE IN ANTANANARIVO IN OPPOSITION TO
GOVERNMENT EDUCATION POLICES WHICH WAS TANTAMOUNT TO

OPPOSITION TO THE GOVERNMENT ITSELF. FAILING TO CAJOLE THE STUDENTS BACK TO THE CLASSROOMS, AND FEARFUL THAT THE STUDENTS WERE OUT TO THWART A SCHEDULED "INTERNATIONAL" SEMINAR, THE GOVERNMENT TEMPORARILY DETAINED A HANDFUL OF THE STRIKING STUDENTS.

THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM WORKS FAIRLY WELL. IT IS PROMPT, EFFECTIVE AND GENERALLY AVOIDS INVOLVEMENT WITH POLITICAL ISSUES. THERE HAVE BEEN NO KNOWN CASES OF TORTURE OR OTHER DEGRADING PUNISHMENT IN RECENT YEARS. AN EMBASSY OFFICER WHO VISITED ANTANANARIVOPRISON SEVERAL TIMES IN 1977, REPORTED THAT ALTHOUGH HE WAS NOT FREE TO ROAM THROUGH THE PRISON, IT APPEARED THAT THERE WAS A GENERAL FRIENDLY ATMOSPHERE IN THE PRISON AND THAT CONDITIONS, WHILE QUITE RUDIMENTARY, WERE HARDLY THOSE OF A DUNGEON. THERE ARE FEW INSTANCES KNOWN OF HOUSE SEARCHES.

RIOTS OCCURRED IN DECEMBER 1976 IN THE WEST COAST CITY OF MAJUNGA BETWEEN THE NATIVE MALAGASY POPULACE AND AN IMMIGRANT MINORITY FROM THE COMORO ISLANDS. ABOUT 1000 COMORIANS WERE KILLED AS A RESULT OF THESE DISTURBANCES, AND A LARGE PART OF THE COMMUNITY THEREAFTER RETURNED TO THE COMORO ISLANDS. WHILE THE GOVERNMENT DID NOT
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PAGE 03 STATE 142619

INSTIGATE THE RIOTS, ITS POLICE AND SECURITY FORCES MERELY OBSERVED AND DID NOTHING TO STOP THEM.

2. RESPECT FOR CIVIL AND POLITICAL LIBERTIES.

FREEDOM OF THOUGHT AND RELIGION EXISTS TO A REASONABLE DEGREE IN MADAGASCAR. ABOUT 40 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION IS CHRISTIAN (HALF CATHOLIC, HALF VARIOUS PROTESTANT DENOMINATIONS) AND RELIGION IS RESPECTED. IN 1975 THE NEW GOVERNMENT EXPELLED A FEW NEWLY ARRIVED FOLLOWERS OF DR. MOON. THERE WAS, FOR ABOUT 3-4 MONTHS, SOME CENSORSHIP OF AMERICAN MISSIONARIES' MAIL BECAUSE ANOTHER PREACHER, AT FIRST BELIEVED TO BE PROSELYTIZING A NEW CULT LIKE DR. MOON'S, HAD ARRIVED AND CAME UNDER SUSPICION. HE WAS ALLOWED TO REMAIN FOR A YEAR, HOWEVER. THE PRESS DOES NOT PUBLISH ARTICLES WHICH WOULD DISCOMFORT THE GOVERNMENT OR ITS INTERNATIONAL FRIENDS. A NEWSPAPER IS RARELY SUSPENDED FOR INCLUDING SUCH AN ARTICLE, BUT THE PAPER MAY NOT HAVE THE TIME OR THE MONEY TO PUBLISH A SECOND EDITION THAT DAY TO REPLACE THE CONFISCATED FIRST EDITION. RADIO AND TV ARE GOVERNMENT-RUN, AND THE LINE IS HEAVILY MARXIST-SOCIALIST, ALTHOUGH SINCE MID-1976 THERE HAS BEEN CONSIDERABLY LESS ANTI-US AND ANTI-WESTERN PROPAGANDA. THE TONE OF RADIO-TV AND THE GOVERNMENT'S NEW DAILY NEWSPAPER (TO SUPPORT ITS NEW POLITICAL ORGANIZATION) HAS BEEN REMARKABLY NEUTRAL AT MOST TIMES.

TRAVEL IS NOT RESTRICTED WITHIN THE COUNTRY BUT IT HAS

BECOME INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN PASSPORTS OR AUTHORIZATION TO TRAVEL ABROAD EXCEPT ON BUSINESS. MORE-OVER, THE GOVERNMENT HAS SHARPLY LIMITED FUNDS WHICH MAY BE TAKEN OUT OF THE COUNTRY, FURTHER LIMITING TRAVEL POSSIBILITIES. EMIGRATION IS NOT MUCH OF AN ISSUE, BUT IT IS ASSUMED THAT IT WOULD NOT BE EASY TO ACCOMPLISH.

A SERIES OF MUNICIPAL AND PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS HAVE BEEN TAKING PLACE OVER THE PAST FEW MONTHS AND WILL CULMINATE
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PAGE 04 STATE 142619

IN NATIONAL ELECTIONS JUNE 30. SEVERAL POLITICAL PARTIES HAVE BEEN PERMITTED TO FIELD CANDIDATES, BUT THE OLD RULING SOCIALIST PARTY IS OUTLAWED. NEVERTHELESS, THERE ARE REPORTS THAT EX-SOCIALIST MEMBERS ARE RUNNING UNDER OTHER PARTY BANNERS WITH FEW PROBLEMS, AND MANY OF THESE SUPPORTERS ARE EVEN SAID TO HAVE SHIFTED TO THE CURRENT REGIME'S PARTY.

3. ECONOMIC RIGHTS.

MADAGASCAR IS NOT POOR IN AGRICULTURE BUT ITS ECONOMY HAS BEEN SLIPPING DOWNHILL DURING THE PAST 5-6 YEARS. HEALTH CARE AND EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES ARE REASONABLY AMPLE FOR A COUNTRY IN ITS STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT, AND THERE HAS BEEN AN APPRECIABLE AMOUNT OF FOREIGN AID FROM WESTERN COUNTRIES AND MULTILATERAL ORGANIZATIONS WHICH HAS HELPED IMPROVE THE PICTURE. MADAGASCAR USED TO BE A NET RICE EXPORTER, BUT HAS HAD TO IMPORT AN AVERAGE OF 50,000 TONS PER YEAR LATELY SINCE IT REORGANIZED THE DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM IN 1973, REMOVING THE CHINESE AND INDIAN MIDDLEMEN AND REPLACING THEM WITH INEXPERIENCED QUASI-GOVERNMENTAL AGENTS. CORRUPTION IS NOT RIFE, BUT THERE ARE SOME ELEMENTS AT THE LOWER AS WELL AS UPPER LEVELS, AND THE POOR DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM HAS BROUGHT ABOUT A LIMITED BLACK MARKET AMONG PRODUCERS AND OTHER ALTERNATIVE OUTLETS. PER CAPITA INCOME IN MADAGASCAR WAS DOLS. 200 IN 1975.

4. GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITY.

THE GOVERNMENT HAS NOT HAD TO DEFEND ITS HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD BECAUSE OF THE SMALL NUMBER OF VIOLATIONS AS DESCRIBED ABOVE AND BECAUSE THERE IS NO OUTCRY FROM THE PUBLIC. SOME OPPOSITION ELEMENTS WOULD, OF COURSE, LIKE MORE FREEDOM TO PUBLISH THEIR OWN PRESS AND TO SEE RESTORATION OF ALL PARTIES TO NORMAL STATUS. NEW ELECTIONS NOW
CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 05 STATE 142619

UNDERWAY SHOULD HELP RESTORE THE PRE 1972 POLITICAL CONDITIONS WHICH PERMITTED PARTIES TO OPERATE IN OPPOSITION TO THE GOVERNMENT.

5. WILLINGNESS TO PERMIT OUTSIDE INVESTIGATIONS.

MADAGASCAR AGREED TO A 1976 VISIT BY AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, BUT AI POSTPONED THE VISIT INDEFINITELY WHEN PRESIDENT RATSIRAKA ANNOUNCED A GENERAL AMNESTY ON DECEMBER 31, 1975. DUE TO ITS REASONABLY GOOD RECORD ON HUMAN RIGHTS, WE SHOULD EXPECT THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD REMAIN OPEN TO CERTAIN DISCUSSIONS ON HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS. ON THE INTERNATIONAL FRONT, MADAGASCAR HAS BEEN IN THE FOREFRONT OF NATIONS CONDEMNING WHITE MAJORITY RULE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA AND HAS JOINED WITH OTHER AFRICAN COUNTRIES IN CALLING FOR BLACK MAJORITY RULE.

B. ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. US HUMAN RIGHTS OBJECTIVES.

OUR OBJECTIVES OVER THE NEXT YEAR SHOULD BE TO ENCOURAGE MADAGASCAR TO CONTINUE ON ITS RETURN TO PARLIAMENTARY RULE. WE COULD ALSO MAKE SOME QUIET REPRESENTATIONS FOR THE RELEASE OF THE FEW REMAINING POLITICAL PRISONERS.

2. US INFLUENCE.

RELATIONS HAVE BEEN STRAINED BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES FOR SEVERAL YEARS, AND NEITHER WE NOR THE MALAGASY HAVE AN AMBASSADOR IN RESIDENCE. WE STOPPED OUR AID PROGRAM IN MADAGASCAR IN 1975 FOLLOWING THE MALAGASY SEIZURE OF OUR NASA TRACKING STATION. IN 1976 THE MALAGASY EXPELLED THREE MEMBERS OF OUR DIPLOMATIC MISSION AND WE RETALIATED BY SENDING HOME ONE MEMBER OF THEIR EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON.

WHILE RELATIONS HAVE BEEN IMPROVING SOMEWHAT IN RECENT MONTHS, WE NEVERTHELESS LACK THE LEVERAGE TO PRESSURE THE CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 06 STATE 142619

MALAGASY TO IMPROVE THEIR HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD. FURTHERMORE, SINCE THEIR RECORD IS REASONABLY GOOD BY BOTH AFRICAN AND THIRD WORLD STANDARDS, THE MALAGASY MIGHT WELL BECOME CONVINCED THAT ANY US CRITICISM SINGLING THEM OUT WAS FOR POLITICAL REASONS ONLY. IT IS UNLIKELY THAT ANY OTHER NATIONS WOULD SUPPORT HARSH ACTIONS AGAINST MADAGASCAR ON HUMAN RIGHTS GROUNDS.

3. OPTIONS.

A. COMMEND MADAGASCAR ON ITS NEW ELECTORAL PROCESSES AND EXPRESS THE HOPE THAT THEY WILL LEAD TO A RETURN TO FREE AND REGULAR ELECTIONS.

B. MAKE NOTE OF THE GOOD POINTS IN THE MALAGASY HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD AND STRESS THAT WHILE THIS ACHIEVEMENT IS HIGH BY SOME STANDARDS IT NEVERTHELESS COULD BE IMPROVED

BY THE RELEASE OF THE REMAINING POLITICAL PRISONERS AND BY
MORE OPENNESS IN THE MEDIA.

C. USE OUR VOTE IN THE IFI'S TO PRESS FOR IMPROVED HUMAN
RIGHTS PERFORMANCE.

4. EFFECTIVENESS.

OPTIONS A AND B ABOVE HAVE THE MOST CHANCE OF SUCCEEDING
WITH THE MALAGASY. OPTION C WOULD BRING HOSTILE REACTIONS
AND NOT GUARANTEE ANY CHANGE IN THE LOCAL SITUATION.
INDEED, OUR AID WITHDRAWAL AND ABSENCE OF AN AMBASSADOR
OVER THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS HAVE NOT MADE OUR BILATERAL
NEGOTIATIONS ANY EASIER: SUCH MEASURES ON OUR PART MAY
EVEN HAVE STIFFENED MALAGASY RESISTANCE AND MADE OUR
EFFORTS SEEM LIKE THE BULLYING OF A SUPERPOWER AGAINST
CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 07 STATE 142619

A SMALL NATION.

BY NOTING THE IMPROVING MALAGASY RECORD ON HUMAN RIGHTS
WE MIGHT ALSO AFFORD OURSELVES AN OPPORTUNITY TO IMPROVE
OUR CURRENT POOR RELATIONS WITH THEM. WE COULD COMMEND
THE MALAGASY RECORD AND MENTION OUR MUTUAL DESIRE FOR A
SATISFACTORY SETTLEMENT OF THE PROBLEMS OF SOUTHERN AFRICA,
STATING THAT WE WERE WILLING TO WORK TOGETHER FOR THIS
END. OUR POSITIVE STEPS IN THE HUMAN RIGHTS FIELD MIGHT
GIVE US THE CHANCE TO TURN SUCH GAINS INTO FURTHER DEAL-
INGS TOWARDS A POSITIVE CHANGE IN THE RELATIONS BETWEEN
OUR TWO COUNTRIES. VANCE

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